

Leptospirosis (Weil's disease)

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease associated with wild and domestic animals. Only a few cases are reported each year in New York state.

Who gets leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is primarily an occupational disease that affects farmers, veterinarians, sewer workers or others whose occupation involves contact with animals, especially rats.

How is it spread?

Leptospirosis is spread mainly by the urine of infected animals and is generally not transmitted from person to person.

What are the symptoms of leptospirosis?

The symptoms of leptospirosis are fever, headache, chills, vomiting, jaundice, anemia and sometimes rash. People with leptospirosis are usually quite ill and are often hospitalized.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The incubation period is usually 10 days with a range of four to 19 days.

How is leptospirosis diagnosed?

The disease is diagnosed using specific blood tests available through public health laboratories.

Does past infection with leptospirosis make a person immune?

There are several strains of the organism. Infection with one usually provides immunity to that organism but not to other strains.

What is the treatment for leptospirosis?

The antibiotics of choice are penicillin, streptomycin, tetracycline and erythromycin. Kidney dialysis may be necessary in some cases.

What are the complications associated with leptospirosis?

If not treated, the patient could develop kidney damage. In rare cases, death may occur.

What can be done to prevent the spread of leptospirosis?

Disease prevention consists of good sanitation. The use of boots and gloves in hazardous places and rodent control can also minimize the risk of spread.

My dog has leptospirosis. Is there a risk I can get it from him?

Because of their outdoor activities and frequent contact with water or soil contaminated with the organism, dog infections are not uncommon. Dog vaccination is not completely effective due to a limited coverage in the vaccine for the numerous types of the organism. Infected dogs theoretically pose a risk of transmission to their owners through contact with their urine, although such direct transmission has been infrequently documented. Owners of infected dogs are advised to:

- Work with a veterinarian to treat the infection in their dog.
- Use caution when handling the dog's urine and wash hands whenever there is any question that there was urine contact.
- Until the dog's infection is cleared up, do not let the dog walk or urinate in high risk areas such as parks frequented by children, beaches, near waterways that are used for drinking recreation, etc.